

Alex Wood
State Representative

3rd District



— 1999 Issue Update —

March 1999

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

Greetings from the state capitol, and once again I thank you for the privilege of serving as your state representative.

This is a great time to be living in Washington, and we have much to be thankful for. Even so, there are troubling issues that demand attention of the Legislature. Traffic congestion tops the list. In this newsletter you'll find a summary of some issues lawmakers are now dealing with in 1999 session.

Legislative business has a new twist this year. For only the second time in Washington's history, there are an equal number of Democrats and Republicans in the House of Representatives. I'm optimistic because it will force closer cooperation between the two parties. Also, it should give power to the pragmatists. Better public policy is usually created with dialogue rather than debate. Debate is oppositional, working to prove the other side wrong. Dialogue is collaborative, working together toward common understanding. You'll be hearing a lot about working together, fairness and moderation in the Legislature this year.

If there's something I can help you with, or if you have questions or suggestions regarding legislative issues please write, call or e-mail. I may not be able to get back to you immediately, but I'm always interested in what you have to say.

Thanks again.

Sincerely,

Alex Wood

How you can reach me during the legislative session:

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COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:

- Agriculture and Ecology
- Commerce and Labor (*co-vice chair*)
- Transportation

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This year in the legislature is not typical because of the tie between Democrats and Republicans in the House. There are two house speakers, and every committee has two co-chairs. A high degree of cooperation is needed to get a bill or resolution passed. However, that's not unusual. In a typical year, some 80 percent of the bills are passed. There's a lot more cooperation between the parties than most people would believe. What grabs the headlines are budget battles or occasions when legislators are up until early hours talking about controversial social issues.



BUDGET

The state's needs must be matched with fiscal prudence.

Finding agreement on a new, two-year state budget is the major responsibility for the Legislature this year. So many of legislative discussions revolve around the priorities identified in the budget.

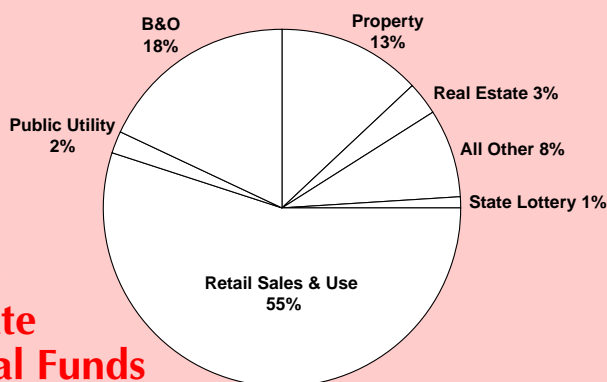
The next two-year budget period begins July 1, 1999, and runs through June 30, 2001. Clearly, the decisions we make this year will go a long way in reflecting the type of state we want Washington to be as the new century unfolds. What do we want for schools? For less-fortunate fellow citizens? For the environment? These and other questions must be answered as we develop the budget.

Governor Gary Locke has come forward with his own budget plan, a proposal set at \$20.577 billion. Just to carry current programs forward — taking into account inflation and school-enrollment increases — would cost \$20.055 billion.

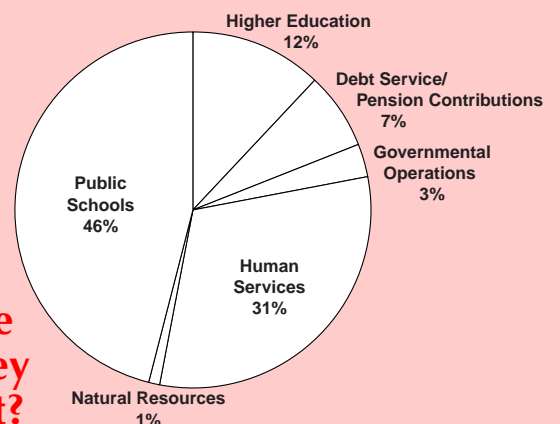
The Legislature has been scrutinizing the governor's ideas. Here are some noteworthy aspects of the governor's proposal:

- **Education.** More public-school teachers to reduce class sizes (\$40 million), continue assistance for schools to meet our education-reform goals (\$52 million), pursue the Reading Corps program to make sure young students master their basic skills (\$16 million), and provide more higher-education opportunities to give additional citizens an equal chance to attend college (\$62 million).
- **Salmon restoration.** Funds would be set aside for continuing the important salmon-recovery work to bring this historic natural resource back to our state waters (\$50 million).
- **Public safety.** The governor also has called for stricter supervision of criminal offenders after they are released (\$15 million), as well as a much tighter parole standard for juvenile offenders after they are released (\$1.4 million).
- **Tobacco money.** Over the course of the next two years, it's anticipated that Washington will receive \$323 million as part of the national settlement with the major tobacco companies. With the bulk of that total, the governor wants to expand the state's Basic Health Plan to provide coverage for additional working families, authorize additional Medicaid assistance for needy children, and set up programs to stop the tobacco habit. Money to educate young people about the dangers of tobacco use, including strongly worded TV ads, would come from an endowment fund that would earn interest, and grow year by year.
- **Welfare reform.** Public-assistance caseloads have dropped as a result of welfare reform, and the governor would direct that these savings go for education programs (\$193 million). However, many legislators — myself included — want at least half this money going for day care needs, food banks, community health centers and other programs that help our poorest citizens.

Where Do State General Funds Come From?



How Is The Money Spent?



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ROLL OF THE DICE

No pun intended, but it's a sure bet that the legislature will deal with gambling-related proposals this year. A significant rise in the number of non-tribal mini-casinos around the state has alarmed many concerned about gambling's impact. I've introduced two bills intended to bring attention to the issue of problem gambling. One measure — HB 1625 — would take a portion of lottery advertising funds and apply them to problem gambling education. The other — HB 2163 — would funnel money from the gaming industry to groups such as gamblers anonymous so that we can help people who are already in trouble.

The rapid growth in non-tribal casinos was made possible by several changes in Washington's gambling laws since 1994. But the real spark came in 1997 when the Legislature allowed house-banked card games, where a casino — or the house — plays against gamblers and keeps the winnings.

The Legislature may take a full review of the 1997 law. Many legislators and Gov. Gary Locke have said the bill was presented as little more than a technical change in the law. Since the bill went into effect, more than 30 mini-casinos have opened around the state.

Spokane has more casinos per capita than anywhere in the state. I don't expect this trend to continue. Our area can support only so much.



BURIED IN TRAFFIC

Consider this number: 70,528. That's how many more vehicles (cars, trucks, motorcycles, etc.) were registered in Spokane County in 1998 than in 1988. Statewide it's more than one million.

In recent years, many Spokane residents have enjoyed the benefits that come with a growing urban economy. But this also meant increasing frustration for businesses and commuters who compete daily for the same lanes on the same roads to get to work and deliver their farm goods and merchandise to market.

A number of key bottlenecks around the state, especially in the Spokane area, have not been adequately addressed because of the high cost. Governor Locke is proposing to target \$1.25 billion — more than half of the new transportation revenue made available through passage of Referendum 49 — to relieve these choke points, with lasting benefits for the entire state.

Freeway Blues

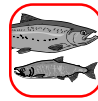
One of the key corridors: the much debated State Route 395, the North Spokane Freeway. It would

complete a critical link from I-90 to Highway Two, north of Spokane.

The current Highway 395 is two lanes each way from San Diego to Washington state. The Tri-Cities area and from Spokane north to British Columbia are the last congestion points on this important regional route. Work on ending that congestion hopefully will begin this year.

The North Spokane Freeway has been debated since 1946. The need for something to alleviate the north-south traffic pressure is obvious. Division Street is the major Eastern Washington access road between I-90 and 395 going into Canada. Truck traffic on Division alone has increased 40 percent in the last eight years.

The Transportation Commission and Governor Locke's budget both recommend spending \$120-million for right-of-way purchases and preliminary construction. Other plans now place that figure as high as \$200-million. It will be late in the session before the final transportation budget is pieced together. But as of this writing all signs are positive that funds will be included for the project.



WATER RIGHTS AND SALMON

The decline of salmon runs in Washington waters has been at the top of the news in recent years. No one would counter the notion that salmon are a wonderful and internationally known trademark of our state. Salmon recovery is one of the Legislature's foremost environmental issues in the 1999 session.

It's equally true that Washington's families, like Washington's salmon, need a healthy environment in which to grow and thrive. Our families have a right to enjoy clean air and water, as well as productive farms and forests. When it comes to environmental issues, there better be enough seats at the discussion table to go around for everybody — because we're all in this thing together. Legislators and citizens will be asked to make some tough decisions about the future uses of water. We may need to make sacrifices, but that doesn't mean we can't continue to have economically viable farms, timber harvest, and new growth and industry. The key is that we employ sound science to make smarter choices.

Legislative landscape

In less than 18 months, every Washington county will feel the impacts from the listing of salmon species for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The ramifications of the listings will hit water-use and land-use policies, as well as policies involving forestry, agriculture, fishing, dams, tribal relations, and other areas.

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Whatever we do, we've simply got to keep the decision-making process at the state level. Our state's recovery plan must be based on sound science if it is to pass muster with the National Marine Fisheries Service. The strategy should address a very important group of "H" words: habitat, hydropower/hydrology, hatcheries, and harvest. No less important is that we guarantee an appropriate level of funding, as well as proper enforcement, implementation, and monitoring.



KIDS AND CRIME

Two years ago, the Legislature cut funding — about \$1.3 million — for supervising juvenile criminals after they get out of state prison. Those already on the streets, or scheduled to be released, include those convicted of rape, robbery, kidnaping, molestation, assault, intimidating a witness and arson. It's also possible, under the guidelines, that convicted murderers will get released without any parole supervision.

The funding was cut two years ago when the state was looking at large surpluses, with the explanation that the cuts were needed to fund a new program of high-intensity parole. That new program affects 25 percent of offenders judged to have the highest risk of committing new crimes.

Only the worst four percent of juvenile criminals are sent to the state's juvenile prison system, run by the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (JRA). About 2,500 offenders are sent to JRA each year. Some 82 percent are substance abusers or are chemically dependent. Nearly half of these youth need mental health treatment. Over 20 percent of JRA inmates have eight or more offenses on their record.

Governor Locke's proposed budget contains funds to restore regular parole supervision for all JRA inmates. The cost to restore supervision is greater than the cost of the cut due to the expenses of restarting the program. I agree with the governor that this is probably the best way of dealing with the problem.

You're
Invited...

TOWN HALL MEETING

Representative Jeff Gombosky and I have scheduled a **town hall meeting**. We'll talk about what's going on this legislative session and any other state issues you might have questions about. The meeting is **Saturday, March 20th**, from **1 p.m. to 3 p.m.** at the **West Central Community Center**. The address is **1603 N. Belt**. See you there!

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